

Study finds healthy musky population on Chippewa Flowage

HAYWARD Wis. – State fisheries biologists conducting a genetics study of muskellunge in the Chippewa Flowage have documented something that many anglers have known for years: The “Big Chip” has a healthy and thriving musky population.

“We netted two fish over 50 inches, many over 40, and the males were so big that we sometimes mistook them for females at first glance,” said Frank Pratt, a Department of Natural Resources fisheries biologist at Hayward. Male musky do not normally reach the size of older females, which on average run bigger than their counterparts.

A department-sponsored musky genetics study is being done this year on the Chippewa Flowage and many other waters in the DNR Northern Region. DNA analysis will be done by researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

“We hope to learn about the genetic health of musky populations and also determine which ones are similar to others,” said Pratt. “This information is vital to making decisions about stocking and about where to collect broodstock for hatchery production.”

He added that 145 fin tissue samples were obtained for DNA analysis, far exceeding the project goal of 50.

“Genetic study results won’t be known for several months,” Pratt said.

But, what was found during the study, he said should make any musky angler smile.

A total of 151 muskies over 20 inches long were captured in the fyke nets, and 52, or 34.4 percent, of those were greater than 40 inches in length. Among the sexually mature fish (all but one), 93 were males and 57 were females.

Pratt said the last time a population estimate was done on the flowage was in 1990 and 1991. At that time surveyors found between 3,000 and 4,000 adult musky in the 15,300 acre water body, with 12 percent of them greater than 40 inches.

“Estimating the actual number of muskies was not the objective of this study,” Pratt explained, “but finding all these big healthy fish on one of many waterways that you manage is always a joy.”

The study was done by four teams of people from the Spooner hatchery, the Hayward DNR, and the Lac Court Oreilles Tribal Conservation Department.

Data collected during this survey on musky, pike, bluegill and crappie will help the Hayward DNR Fish Team to complete their upcoming Fishery Management Plan for the Chippewa Flowage, due out to the public by June 30.

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